

FLY-FISHING TOMS RIVER

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As you approach the stream you begin to formulate a plan of attack. It's late Spring, and you've already had good success fishing Toms River earlier this month; even though you didn't bother with the first couple of weeks of the season. The number of anglers fishing the river in the spring has doubled in recent years and fly-fishing the Toms is just not a social affair for you.

You can remember when nobody fished the river during the week and it boasted very few anglers on weekends. But since the local Trout Unlimited Chapter began stocking the river, improving access and convinced the state of its trout holding potential, that has all changed. You do however, enjoy fishing the Riverwood Park section of the river. You've heard rumors of some trophy brook trout being stocked here this year!

You try reading the stream to reformulate your game-plan. The water will tell you what needs to be tied to the end of your tippet. The water has an amber tint, typical of Central Jersey acid streams. You think to yourself how similar the water color is to the Adirondack Hemlock streams.

However, the banks of Toms River have no Hemlock but are thickly protected by Mountain Laurel and Scrub Pine. The canopy of Red Maple and Oak is just coming into its own, and you know from experience that once the canopy has matured you can wade the stream without ever having to worry about getting sunburned.

The water seems a bit low and crystal clear for this time of year. On the surface of the clear, amber water are thousands of caddisflies skimming the surface. Are they hatching or dropping egg sacs?

You assume that if they were hatching they would head straight for the bank cover instead of skimming the surface. It is important because if they are hatching, a caddis pupa imitation is usually successful on these waters.

You are about to attempt to capture a specimen when one is courteous enough to land on your vest. It's about a hook size #16 and has an olive body with gray mottled wings. You can't really tell if it's a dun (hatching) or an egg laying female. If you can find some trout taking flies with splashing rises, chances are the caddisflies are laying eggs.

So are the trout feeding on them? If so, are they taking the adults or pupae? You stalk along the bank cover and are happy to find several trout rising frantically at the head of a pool, where the riffle water glides into the pool and swirls along a large fallen oak. Surprise again, a good size brook trout goes airborne for what you now conclude to be an egg laying, Dun Wing Olive Caddis.

You chuckle to yourself; whoever said, that brook trout prefer not to rise for surface food, has never fished Toms River. You've also read someplace that biologists contend, brook trout do not feed on other fish. So what do they think your Mickey Finn Streamer is, which is so successful in the early Spring? In fact, of all the streams you fish, you find that Toms River Brookies are the most opportunistic feeders you encounter.

Although most of the brookies (sometimes rainbows) you catch are stuffed with caddisflies (larvae, pupae and dries)--you also find that they readily take imitations of mayflies, stoneflies, leeches and

minnows. In addition, starting around July, you catch many of your fish on terrestrial imitations; black and cinnamon ants, leaf hoppers, inch worms and crickets. Toms River provides a fine smorgasbord of trout delectables.

You tie a #16 Dun Wing Olive Caddis Dry imitation to your 5X (3.5lb.test) tippet. You have more success with this cut wing pattern than with an elk hair pattern. It's probably because there is only a few stretches of very fast water on the Toms. Most of the river has a constant, meandering flow. The trout get a real good look at any and all of your dry fly imitations. The cut wing pattern does have a more realistic silhouette.

You stay crouched as you enter the water in hopes that the streamside brush will break up your silhouette. You position yourself thirty feet upstream and across from the rising trout. Unlike the usual practice of fishing a dry fly upstream and dead drift, you're going to attempt to "skitter" the fly downstream and across.

Because the naturals are skimming the surface, so should your imitation. You forget where you learned this method, was it a magazine article or a book? You forget and all that matters is that it has worked in this situation before.

You glance over your right shoulder to be sure there is a casting lane. It's a type of "backcast paranoia" you've developed fly-fishing Toms River. The Toms is very unforgiving to those who fish with long rods and long lines.

Your fly lands near the far bank just barely missing the overhanging vegetation. Immediately you lift the rod tip to the ten

o'clock position as the fly begins its swing. You lower the rod tip to the nine o'clock position and create a bit of slack and a foot or two of drag free float.

Just before the fly reaches the trout's lie, you lift again and jiggle the rod tip. The fly "skates" on the surface, when suddenly the trout's body shatters the surface to grab your fly. You hardly have enough time to take up the slack. Now you can feel the throb of a live creature, a beautiful brook trout. Not only do you feel "connected" to the trout, but somehow you feel "part of" the entire ecosystem--as if you were the focus of a landscape painting completed in an instant, by an all powerful artist.

You and the trout, attached through ten feet of gossamer thread, flies buzzing about you, landing occasionally to rest on your vest, and the current of the river on the back of your legs, urging you downstream. You feel the river for what it is--a living, moving, sensual entity.

After a few minutes the trout begins to tire. It is now sideways in the current and before you know it you have the fly between your forceps. You notice a light blue tag with "TRTU470 23" behind the dorsal fin of the trout. You remove the tag and place it in your vest. The brookie measures about fifteen inches against your rod.

As you release the trout, you immediately search the surface for more riseforms. You think that it's a good deal, collecting the tags from the fish you catch and depositing them at the nearest collection station. One stocked trout to catch--just for your cooperation.

You catch one more smaller trout using the skittering method.

But, you were unable to coax a larger brookie into taking a skittered fly or one that was dead drifted. Being analytical, you think that the selectivity of some trout is what makes fly-fishing so interesting. You comfort yourself in the knowledge that this time of year produces some excellent mayfly spinner falls in the evening.

The Toms River is undoubtedly the most underrated trout fishery in New Jersey. It is also the most unique--typical of Central Jersey acid waters, with smooth flowing pools and riffles, adding to the mystique.

Out of its one hundred miles or so of banks, probably less than five percent of it is fished. The most accessible and fishable waters are the 2.5 miles which run through Riverwood Park located in Dover Township. The water which runs through the lower end of the park may become "Trout Conservation Waters" in 1990.

Proposed Trout Conservation Waters are reserved to those waters which will sustain trout all year-round (there have been claims that some trout reproduce in these waters). That the trout will live and grow in these waters. The fishing regulations would be: Fishing with artificial lures only (spinners, flies, spoons), with a creel limit of one fish at least fifteen inches, per day. These waters would remain open to fishermen all year.

There is no "fly-fishing by the book" on the Toms. The most successful fly-fishermen on the Toms have been fishing it for years. The Toms demands innovation from its anglers. But given a little patience, equipped properly (flies and tackle) and a couple of fishing trips, new fly-fishermen to its waters can be quite successful.

As far as tackle, the Toms River dictates short rod fishing. The rod I use is a seven foot, four weight. Most of the fly-fishing regulars use rods of five to six feet in length. I prefer the line control that a little longer rod provides. Many of the veterans have converted old ultralight spinning rods, into "shortie" fly rods.

A good double tapered, three to five weight floating fly line on your five to seven foot rod works out nicely. I recommend a double tapered fly line because you will be doing a lot of shortline roll casting. Much of Toms River which runs through Riverwood Park is only thirty feet wide and lined with thick brush.

Leader lengths should range from five to seven feet. Remember you're using short rods and a lot of roll casting. The longest leader I use is during midge hatches and runs about seven feet in length. Sometimes I'll go down to a leader of five feet in late Fall and early Spring, when fishing wooly buggers or streamer patterns.

I recommend that you go down one size diameter on your tippet than what you would normally use. I do this because of the extra short leaders used and find that I will get more hits by doing so. For example normally you fish a 4X tippet with a #16 fly. You arrive at this by using the formula, fly size divided by four ( $\#16 \div 4 = 4X$ ). I would use 5X in this circumstance by adding one ( $\#16 \div 4 + 1 = 5X$ ).

I strongly recommend chest waders and fishing in the stream instead of from the bank. Very little water is fishable from the bank given the extremely thick bank cover and many pools are too deep for hip boots. I use light weight nylons and wear long underwear in the Winter and early Spring. Water temperatures on the Toms range from the

high thirties in the coldest of Winter, to the high sixties in the hottest Summers. I believe the mean water temperature for the year is fifty-nine degrees Fahrenheit.

The obvious question you should be asking yourself is, what patterns should I use? I think it would be a good idea to look over the Hatch Chart developed from the Stream Notebooks of Toms River's most successful fly-fisher, Joe Studier (see end of article). Allow me to highlight some of the patterns I use by season.

Spring is always a time of great expectations, and often the most difficult for fly-fishing. Most freestone streams are much too high to fish consistently. Not so for the Toms. The Toms is very much "fishable" in early Spring even with a floating line. My two favorite season openers are Wooly Buggers and Streamers (Muddler & Micky Finn).

My notebooks for April and early May indicate that about seventy percent of my fish are caught on a black or olive Wooly Buggers. I tie my own, and add marabou tails mixed with some crystal flash. They are heavily weighted affairs on #6-#8 4x long hooks, with bead chain eyes. I believe they must imitate either leeches or crane fly larvae which are both present in great numbers on the Toms.

The Muddler I tie is just like the Whitlock Sculpin pattern, except that it is tied in a light amber color. There are a lot of Johnny Darters, an amber sculpin like minnow, which inhabit the shallow waters of the Toms.

Siphloplecton bisale, a large olive/gray mayfly also hatches in April, but in the Dun form is usually unavailable to the trout. They hatch on rocks and logs and immediately fly into the nearest brush.



However, the nymph ~~is~~ ~~is~~ is a very good swimmer and is available to the trout near hatching time. I use an Isonychia imitation, and it works just fine.

By mid May there is a cornucopia of insect activity. There is the year long Tan Caddis hatches. They seem especially heavy in May however. They are also usually larger than later in the year, sizes #16 and #18.

There is also two major Dun Caddis hatches in May. The smaller #14 or #16 Olive Dun Caddis and the #12 or #14 Dark Dun Caddis. Both these hatches can supply some outstanding dry fly action in the afternoons.

The Gray Fox hatch on the Toms is very sporadic, but does supply some terrific evening fishing to the spinners. The spinners are an opaque white color in a size #14. Also in the mornings you may come across a small Blue Wing Olive, and I have had occasional success fishing this hatch.

June is a good month for fishing the evening spinner falls of the Light Cahill and the Little Pale Fox. For the whole month of June the evening<sup>s</sup> will be filled with the spinners of one or the other or both. Again the spinners are opaque when fully spent. However, both of the spinner falls provide good dry fly fishing with a traditional Light Cahill pattern in sizes #14 thru #20.

Also in June during the day is a sporadic hatch of a huge brown caddis which the trout will chase like crazy. The large Brown Caddis is best imitated using a #10 or #12 Elk Hair Caddis imitation and "skittered". It's almost like Bass-fishing.

July through September <sup>are</sup> ~~is~~ terrestrial months on the Toms, although minnow imitations can be very successful. There is also the occasional Tan Caddis hatch in the smaller sizes #20 or #22.

I've had most of my success fishing large Carpenter Ant imitations in sizes #14 and #16. Although once in a while the fish prefer a smaller Cinnamon Ant size #18. Cricket imitations can also work magic in the middle of the afternoon<sup>s</sup>. I like the Letort Cricket in sizes #14 and #16.

October through March I return to fishing Wooly Buggers and minnow imitations. However, there is a big Needle Stonefly hatch in February. Many fly-fishermen have good success fishing stonefly nymph imitations during the Fall and Winter. Stonefly patterns range from #4 4X long (Great Stone), to #8 4X long (Willow Stone), down to #16 2x long (Needle Stone).

There is occasional midge hatches during the winter which sometimes will bring smaller fish to the surface to feed, if the air temperature is unusually warm. Tan Caddis hatches occur through October.

I strongly recommend you visit us here ~~on~~ Toms River. I know you will be pleasantly surprised with the good trout fishing available in Central New Jersey.

Riverwood Park is easy to get to off the Parkway. Take Exit 88 off the Parkway. It is the Route 70 Exit. Bare right off the exit and head West on Route 70. About three miles up Route 70 you will take a left onto Route 527. About 1/2 mile on Route 527 heading South you will take a Right onto Riverwood Road (Route 527 parallels Route 9 and

the river). Follow Riverwood Road into the Park Parking lot. Follow the path down to the River. There are a few paths which lead downstream along the river. See you on Toms River!

TOMS RIVER HATCHES								
COMMON NAME	LATIN NAME	Seasonal Emergence					HATCHING TIME	HOOK SIZE
		Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug		
Blue Wing Olive	Baetis Vagans						midday	16-18
Speckled Lake Olive	Siphloplecton bisale						midday	8-10
Early Blue Quill	Paraleptophlebia						midday	16-18
Dark Dun Caddis	Brachycen-trus						midday	12-14
Dun Olive Caddis	Hydropsyche						midday	14-16
Blk. Willow Stonefly	Aconeucia nigrita						sporadic	8-10
Gray Fox	Stenonema fuscum						sporadic	12-14
Blue Wing Olive	Ephemerella lata						mid morning	18-20
Light Cahill	Stenonema canadense						evening	14-16
Brown Caddis.	Brachycen-trus						sporadic	10-12
Little Olive Sedge	Rhyaciphil-ia basalis						sporadic	16-18
Little Pale Fox	Stenonema pallidum						evening	18-20
Little Yel. Stone	Isoperla bilineata						evening	16-18
Little Grn. Stone	Alloperla imbecilla						evening	16-18
Blue Wing Olive	Baetis hiemalis						afternoon	20-24
Small Tan Caddis	different families						sporadic	16-20
Midges	Chironomus						all day	18-28

\* Chart prepared from the notes of Joe Studier